

MINUTES
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BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2006
SPECIAL SESSION
COMMUNITY ROOM, CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL
8:00 AM

Call to Order

A special meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order in open session at 8:00 AM on Saturday, January 28, 2006 in the Community Room of the Chenery Middle School. All members were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti, Town Accountant Barbara Hagg, and members of the Warrant Committee were also present.

FY07 BUDGET HEARINGS – DEPARTMENTS

Police & Public Safety Communications

Police Chief Andrew O'Malley and Assistant Chief Richard Lane appeared before the Board. Chief O'Malley reported that the budget for fiscal 2007 is for 47 officers. We currently have 41. We are hiring 6 more. We had 43 on June 1, 2005, and since then we have lost 3 and gained 2. We are now at minimum manning which means we just answer calls and don't do traffic. Overtime costs have increased and the Chief has requested a transfer from the salary reserve to cover this. We are projecting the final number for FY06 will be \$260,000 in patrol overtime costs.

We have 17 supervising officers overseeing many civilian employees as well as reserve officers, for a total of approximately 90 people. Our ratio of supervisors to personnel is not out of line with neighboring towns.

Chief O'Malley explained the process for replacing police cruisers. The Board asked how many police vehicles there are total. The Chief answered there are 17 including a parking van. This van is also available for use by other departments.

Mark Paolillo, Chairman of the Public Safety Subcommittee of the Warrant Committee, said that the police budget is essentially flat for FY07 if you factor out the cost of replacing the cruisers which used to be in the capital budget and factor in the increased FY06 overtime cost. Fuel costs have gone up dramatically. There has been a decrease in wages because we are replacing veteran officers with new ones. Transfer out of officers is a significant issue, and the Subcommittee recommends looking at ways to offer incentives to 5-10 year officers to keep them here. It is cheaper to keep an officer than to

pay time-and-a-half in overtime to cover his shifts. Another way to save money might be to use closed circuit cameras to assist with traffic enforcement.

Selectman Brownsberger asked if the number budgeted for FY07 patrol overtime is sufficient and the Chief answered that he thought it was. He stated that Arlington is budgeting \$300,000 for overtime and usually ends up needing more. He compared overtime costs in FY04 to other towns and it was clear that our cost is not high compared to neighboring communities. Chief O'Malley noted that officers have been helpful in re-working schedules to avoid unnecessary overtime costs.

Selectman Firenze raised the question of how many officers we actually need and what isn't getting done if we are not at the level we should be at. Traffic obviously is the biggest area that has suffered. He stated that he got more comfortable with this when he learned that 47 officers is a number that was recommended to us. The Chief clarified that the number is from the federal Department of Justice, they recommend for towns like Belmont an average of 47 officers. Assistant Chief Lane noted that the problem with overtime isn't just money, it's officers working 60-70 hours a week which can cause problems for the safety of the officers and the public. Chief O'Malley said that we have actually had to force officers to work overtime for the first time in a long time and will probably have to do more of that this summer.

The Board asked if the cost of hiring and training the new officers is factored into the budget and the Chief broke down the costs and confirmed that they are included. However he cautioned that we will probably lose another officer or two before the new officers get out of the academy.

The Board asked about funding for professional development and ongoing training. Chief O'Malley answered that he is asking for a \$5000 increase in this item with the influx of new officers in mind. This helps officers to develop specialties such as domestic violence or traffic. There was agreement that it is more effective to do recurring training than just to do one-time seminars.

Returning to the transfer issue, the Chief explained that he and Mr. Younger have put together a list of suggestions for incentives to cut down on transfers at the Board's request.

Public Safety Communications Director Dan McAuley discussed the E-911 system. The only budget increase for public safety communications is for radio maintenance to get us through until the new tower comes on line. The Board asked about the idea of regionalizing E-911. Mr. McAuley said this will probably happen eventually in the future. It is easier to consolidate fire communications than police because police departments have more variation in the way they operate and call volume is much greater (about 20,000 versus 3,000 per year.) We have combined our police and fire dispatch in town and now two dispatchers do what three had done before.

Emergency Management (BEMA)

BEMA Director Leo Saidnawey appeared before the Board. He is asking for a small increase to do outreach to citizens. Our classes have been very well received. We have been able to get some federal grants which have been very helpful. Mr. Younger noted that Mr. Saidnawey is very active and we have had a lot of positive comments from the community about his work.

Fire/EMS

Fire Chief David Frizzell and Assistant Chief Angus Davison appeared before the Board. They handed out sheets illustrating what a 13, 12, and 11 person shift actually means in terms of staffing. The minimum level recommended by various studies that have been done is 4 persons on an engine and 5 on a ladder truck. We are consistently below these levels. To achieve an average response time of 6 ½ minutes we would need about 17 people on a house fire. We have a mutual aid agreement called Metro Fire with other communities. This requires we make up to 1/3 of our personnel available for mutual aid. So we are understaffed. In order to keep costs down under a reduced service budget, the Chief proposes to put the ambulance out of service which drops us to a 10 person shift. However, the ambulance generates revenue, so this will mean a loss of revenue. We estimate we net about \$240,000 a year from the ambulance. Our collection rate on ambulance fees is about 90% which is one of the highest.

The trend has been to provide EMS in-house rather than privatizing. One reason is that fire calls have been down. In the future, we see advanced life support/paramedic services also being provided and we could hire paramedics when regular fire officers retire. Currently we provide basic life support and we contract with Armstrong Ambulance to provide advanced life support, which also serves Arlington and Watertown. By having ALS in-house, we would see better response time and increased revenues. However, we do not anticipate we can begin this in FY07 because we don't anticipate any retirements. Chief Frizzell outlined the hiring process for the Board.

The Board asked if we can train our current firefighters as paramedics. Chief Frizzell responded that we have one firefighter who is trained but we are not licensed as an ALS provider. Mr. Younger noted that this is a long training program and it would be difficult to do as an active firefighter. Chief Frizzell confirmed that it takes about a year.

Chief Frizzell stated that under reduced services, all our non-salary accounts have been reduced. The training account has been cut which will put our technical rescue unit out of service because we will not be able to maintain our skills in this area. Finally, we are reducing overtime by \$50,000. This will mean one less person per shift (10 instead of 11) and put the ambulance out of service for about 1/3 of the year. This will mean longer response times, but may also decrease calls because some people are actually more likely to call for an ambulance when they hear one going by. Decreased staff can mean more injuries to staff in transport.

The Board asked if adding a firefighter would save significant overtime costs. Chief Frizzell said it probably would not result in significant savings because you never know

which shift is going to need an extra person. We contractually must have a certain number of persons on a truck.

Chief Frizzell discussed regionalization. We realize that Belmont and many other towns are not meeting the recognized standards for fire response. In May 2002, Chief Frizzell did a report on strategic planning for regional fire service. There will be very little operational savings from regionalization, but we would see a much better fire response and a reduced capital cost as well as some possible economy in administration. In order to move forward, we need to get the other communities to agree that we want to do this. The first concrete step would be to have a unified central dispatch.

Mr. Paolillo explained that the Warrant Committee believes the time is ripe for regionalization. We can work with the Chief to put together a plan for a process for the Board. We also feel that local ALS will mean better service for our residents.

The Board asked Mr. Younger to reach out to neighboring Town Administrators and invite them to begin discussions on this. It was noted that Watertown has told us they are not interested because they are already at a higher level of service. Chief Frizzell stated that you need a minimum of three or four towns to really do this.

The Board recessed at 9:56 AM. For a five minute break.

The Board reconvened at 10:04 AM.

Health/Animal Control/Sealer/Veterans

Dr. David Alper, Chairman of the Board of Health, and Donna Moultrup, Health Director, appeared before the Board.

Dr. Alper began by explaining that most of what the Health Department does is mandated by the state. This limits our ability to control costs. We have explored regionalization – we had a shared animal control officer with Watertown for years, and we currently have a shared hazardous waste site with 8 other communities which does help keep our costs down.

Ms. Moultrup said that public health as it stands now is not equipped to handle a homeland security emergency – we have plans but not the resources to carry them out. We are looking at regionalization particularly in the area of emergency response as a more formal version of some things we have been doing informally. We will be coming to Town Meeting with an agreement to be approved to do this. There is a meeting Monday morning to talk about getting some state aid coming back to the local level. It is very difficult for a town like Belmont to fully fund a properly functioning Health Department

Warrant Committee member Dianne Hobbs added that the Health Department does astonishing work and has to handle more and more mandates coming from the state especially in emergency response.

Warrant Committee member Jim Fitzgerald asked about the snack bar at the rink. Ms. Moultrup stated that we have certified the vendor operating this and limited the menu they can offer, we will inspect it regularly.

Ms. Moultrup noted that for hazardous waste collection day, we have had about 189 people participating and we will be hard pressed to stay at the \$5000 funding level, but we may be able to make it.

The Board reviewed some of the many duties performed by the Board: Food service inspections, swimming pool inspections, infectious disease control, day camp regulations, sewer systems, flu clinics, burial permits, tobacco control, blood pressure clinics, mosquito control. All of which is done by 4 FTEs for \$300,000 per year.

Warrant Committee member Lynne Doblin asked if any fees could or should be raised. Ms. Moultrup answered that we are a little behind on revising the regulations, but are going to be raising the dumpster fees. By and large, she believes our fees are where they should be.

Ms. Moultrup discussed flu shots, explaining that she has had a lot of requests from public safety personnel. It is smart to have our employees vaccinated on-site. This takes less time and encourages a greater participation rate. We can afford to administer flu shots for Town employees but would need an extra \$5000 for the vaccine and that is in the level services budget request.

Ms. Moultrup gave the Board an overview of the animal control program. Animal control officer John Maguranis is saving us money in pound charges and providing better service to residents. We have had a lot of kittens and homeless cats this year which has been a higher expense. Mr. Maguranis also serves as the town's veterans' service officer. We are required to have this program and the needs of veterans can be complex and ongoing. Last year we used up our budget in 6 months on one veteran. We do get a 75% reimbursement from the state for what we spend.

Dr. Alper discussed the Youth Commission. The unfortunate recommendation for the reduced service budget is to eliminate the Youth Commission. We have had enormous successes and Rick Chasse has done an amazing job and relates to the kids amazingly well. Eliminating Mr. Chasse's position would in itself cripple the Commission because no one else can do what he does. He is able to reach different kinds of kids and channel them into our programs. The Butler School has allowed us to use their facilities at virtually no cost for our Friday night Youth Center which has been well attended. We have never had a disciplinary incident at the youth center. It is not that there are not things for kids to do in Belmont, but our Youth Commission allows kids to be kids and to identify the ones that could use a little extra attention and support.

The Board noted that the total cost of the Youth Commission is about \$40,000, of which half is Mr. Chasse's part time salary.

Mr. Younger noted that the elimination of the commission is not in any way a reflection of Mr. Chasse's performance. Chairman Solomon stated it is a personal priority of his to try to find the money to restore the Youth Commission.

Warrant Committee member Liz Allison pointed out that if we say yes to all the great services being provided by every town department, we will double property taxes in 6 years. Selectman Brownsberger qualified this would actually not occur until 2017.

There was additional discussion about core functions of government. It was noted that the Town Administrator was asked to present a budget that preserves core services and he has done that.

Council on Aging

Council on Aging Director Nava Niv-Vogel and Cornelius Hegarty, Chair of the COA, appeared before the Board.

Ms. Niv-Vogel stated that this is a precarious year for us. We do not know if we will be in our current location for much longer, for example. We have absorbed 0.75 FTE driver positions because the federal grant that had funded them had to end. Our vehicle is aging and requires more frequent repairs and suffers from increased fuel costs. We no longer have a professional development budget item. Costs for the trips we run have increased and the travel program is coordinated by a volunteer. If you compare at \$12.50 per hour, we are getting some \$200,000 in value from volunteer services. We would have to cut swimming, ESL, caregiver support, and our quarterly holiday parties under reduced services. We are trying to sustain programs using out \$40,000 revolving account, but not every program can cover its costs through fees. We have a new accounting intern and one of his duties will be to recommend areas where we can raise fees.

Ms. Doblin commented that the revolving account is working as intended. We retained \$6000 in the programs account to try to cover some of the less self-sustainable programs. Ms. Hobbs asked why we can't use cab vouchers instead of a driver. Ms. Niv-Vogel responded that cabs are not well equipped to deal with seniors' mobility issues. Our driver develops a personal relationship with seniors who need transport to medical appointments. If a senior is forgetful or vulnerable, a cab driver is not invested in making sure the senior gets to where they need to go. The one town that has used a taxi voucher system is looking to change that. She does not know of any town in our area that does not provide this type of service.

The Board noted that we provide 10,600 rides annually five days a week, which is roughly 18 round-trip persons per day. We do transport for medical appointments in adjacent towns that are not more than 20 minutes away.

Ms. Doblin asked, if we do not have to pay the rent on the senior center, what happens in FY08 when we have operating costs for the new Senior Center? Also, we are doing without a custodian but we will need one for the new Senior Center. With our trips, we are pricing based on marginal cost of the trips and we should look at capturing the organizational costs in pricing.

There was discussion of staffing numbers. Both reduced service and level service budgets will keep staffing at the FY06 level. The difference between the two budgets is that under reduced services, the Senior Center will move to the trailers behind the HS and we will save \$90,000 in rent. Ms. Niv-Vogel explained that this would mean no space for our large programs like fitness and social events. We have aerobics, tai chi, and strength and flexibility programs. We would have to rent space or make arrangements with schools, churches, or synagogues. Selectman Firenze noted the VFW building might have some availability.

Mr. Younger warned that the rent on the parish hall could go up – we have not received a new proposal yet from the Archdiocese.

The Board noted that neither budget contains funding for a custodian. Currently the Building Services Department is paying to clean the senior center.

Selectman Brownsberger stated that paying the rent and keeping the Senior Center in its existing location will be a priority for him in this budget.

Library

Maureen Conners, Library Director, and two members of the Board of Trustees appeared before the Board.

Ms. Conners said that our circulation at the main library is up this year by 10,000 volumes. Our reference librarians answered over 42,000 questions. Our network transfers are up about 30%. Our meeting rooms are so booked that some of our staff cannot find space for library programs. There were 810 programs and meetings held at the library (342 by the library) with 18,500 attendants. 2300 people attended storytime. The Young Adult department had 1500 students participate in their programs this year.

Reduced services is a 5% reduction in our budget. And yet library usage and demand for programs continues to grow. We have 23.7 FTE and the circulation per FTE is 22,319 which is very high compared to Waltham's 21,000 and Lexington's 17,600, Arlington's 17,000, and Wellesley's 15,000. Under reduced services we will be down 2.6 FTEs so this number will only increase. We will eliminate Sunday hours completely. We will eliminate summer Saturday hours. The Benton branch will be temporarily closed. We may delay the main library opening until 10 AM on some days.

There was discussion of what our union contracts require concerning weekend hours and compensation.

The Board asked about charging fees for DVDs and CDs. Ms. Conners explained that as a public library we cannot charge for anything that is a regular library service. To be part of the Minuteman network we have to have the same borrowing as the other towns. However, if the Friends of the Library want to purchase their own collection, we could charge a rental fee that would go back to the collection.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked if we charge for printing from the Internet and Ms. Conners confirmed that we do.

Ms. Doblin added that it's important to note the reduced services budget hits youth library services twice – once in the library budget and once in the school budget.

The Board recessed at 12:10 PM and returned at 12:18 PM.

Recreation

Bill McKenney, Recreation Director, and Mary Ann Johnson, Recreation Commission Chair, appeared before the Board.

Mr. McKenney began by stating that the department's level service budget request is \$639,916, a \$22,000 increase for salary increases to allow us to retain key personnel. The reduced services budget is a cut of close to \$40,000. This would eliminate support for the Payson Park Music Festival and our new programs account, and would reduce teen activities. We are ahead of last year on revenues at this point. We will be looking at fees for spring and summer programs and probably will see some small increases. If all goes well we could approach \$600,000 in revenue this year, an all time high. The only program we have that does not at least break even is the special needs recreation program.

Ms. Allison said that every year we ask the Recreation Department to break even, and every year there is a deficit. When we add the costs incurred by DPW and other departments providing facilities maintenance to the Recreation Department, we are subsidizing each participant in programs to the tune of some \$200.

There was discussion of the usage and fees for the skating rink, and the usage and maintenance of athletic fields. There was discussion about how to allocate maintenance costs for the fields across programs and departments.

We sell 700-900 family recreation memberships, so about 10% of the community. This year we will make \$1200 from the snack bar at the rink.

Warrant Committee member Robie White said there are 2 larger issues here: Can we restructure offerings to bring in more revenue, and do we want the users of services to be paying for them or do we want to be subsidizing these services.

The Board adjourned at 12:56 PM.

Thomas G. Younger
Town Administrator